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ABSTRACT

"The Goldfinch" is a periodical that introduces young children to various facets of Iowa history. Each issue has a different theme topic and a number of articles covering diverse aspects of the topic being addressed. This issue focuses on myths and legends. Featured articles discuss how stories passed from generation to generation to reveal clues about history. The volume includes a family legend dating from the Civil War era, Native American myths about the origins of man, a legend preserved by Czechoslovakian immigrants, Underground Railroad legends, and famous Iowan hoaxes. Student activities include a myths and legends crossword puzzle, a history hunt maze, and questions about Nathan Isbell Jr.'s diary. (MM)

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Myths & Legends

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Dear Readers,

Think of this issue of *The Goldfinch* as one enormous kitchen table. It's a comfortable place where people gather as a family and tell the stories of their lives. There's room for everyone, so pull up a chair.

Stories are plentiful in Iowa. They go back to the earliest inhabitants of the land. Some of the stories in this issue (such as the Indian myths beginning on page 10) have been around for thousands of years and reveal the heart of the people they represent. Mesquakie stories, for example, convey sacred beliefs and help today's Mesquakie kids know who they are as part of their tribe. Their stories come from an oral tradition, where people told stories to help kids learn traditions, lessons, and history that weren't written down. What stories in your family, community, or culture do you tell to help explain who you are or to preserve your beliefs and traditions?

Also in this issue, you'll hear stories of buried treasure, a Civil War soldier, an elusive sea monster, a brave knight, and a hero of western folklore. Along the way, you'll discover the power of a good story to capture your imagination and not let go. You'll see how events from history inspire legends and how the lives of legendary people can be traced to common beginnings. "I thought it was neat that a tall-tale character like Wyatt Earp could seem so ordinary," said Ben Butler, 9, a member of our kid's advisory board. Are there legends in your own family that you can trace back to an ordinary source such as a family farm or an immigrant ancestor?

Listen to the stories in this issue with your imagination, and pretend you're there, in history, experiencing the events taking place. Then, after you've turned the last page, tell us a story of your own. Stories are part of who we are, and at our enormous kitchen table, there's time for everyone's story.

The Editor

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Myths & Legends

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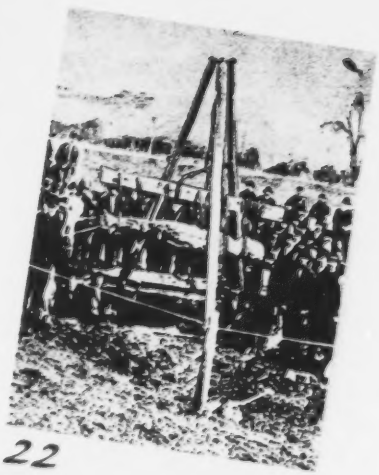

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Tell Me a Story

This issue of *The Goldfinch* may be treading on dangerous ground. Sometimes, like a detective looking for clues to solve a case, historians want "just the facts." For a history magazine, an accurate portrayal of the facts about people, places, dates, and events is crucial. But the topic of **Myths and Legends** goes beyond "just the facts."

Stories reveal a lot about the people of history—what they believed, what they thought was important. The stories people have told for generations teach us about the atmosphere in which the facts of history take place. You've probably heard the legends of King Arthur's court and know the stories of Paul Bunyan and Johnny Appleseed, too. But not all myths and legends come from the distant past, or from distant places. Legends can start in your own family or your own hometown. Most legends start with some fact or event, with something that happened or probably happened. The story excites our imagination, inspires our pride, or maybe makes us stand in awe. The story gets told and retold until it becomes part of who we are as individuals, family, or community. Legends are stories that refuse to go away and sometimes grow in the telling.

PHOTO: SHSI (IOWA CITY)

Telling stories is one way Mesquakie families keep their history alive. This photo of the Buffalo family was taken in 1926. The baby, Mary Ann Buffalo, grew up to become the mother of Johnathan Buffalo, whose retelling of the Mesquakie creation story appears on page 10.

Myths are different from legends. Myths are stories that tell what we believe about our world or about something supernatural. They deal with the origins of religious beliefs. How did the world begin? How did we come to be here? What happens after death?

In its own society, a myth is understood as a true, often sacred story. While stories from Greek mythology may be the best known, myths have evolved in many cultures to explain what people believe, to offer heroes, and to illustrate the differences between good behavior and bad, and explore the consequences of choosing unwisely. Myths are stories

of heroes and events that can't be proven historically, but they speak truth within their society.

The Art and Appeal of Storytelling

"Storytelling brings people closer together," explained Gail Froyen, a retired University of Northern Iowa librarian who now devotes her time to telling stories to school groups and adults in Iowa and across the nation. "Whether it's grandparents telling stories to their grandchildren or kids telling about their day at school, we are all storytellers. Stories are part of who we are as human beings."

Stories move from culture to culture as people migrate from one place to another. Sometimes the stories change over time, but the truth they convey remains.

The tapestry of Iowa stories is woven from threads belonging to every group of people who have called this place home. "People pass on their heritage and values through stories," Froyen said. "Many Native American stories, for example, pass on a value that people are only a part of creation. When a hunter kills an animal, he must have reverence for the life he has taken because [the animal's] life gave him life by providing food and clothing."

Photo: Courtesy Gail Froyen

Gail Froyen, storyteller, at Price Lab School, Cedar Falls, in 1989.

Froyen believes the growing popularity of the ancient art of storytelling is in part a reaction against modern technology. "Storytelling offers intimacy that technology doesn't provide. It fulfills a need for human connection. In stories, you get a flavor for times and people. You get the real essence of what life was like. Names and dates alone have no life." GF

Photo: Frank E. Foster Collection, SHSI (Iowa City)

Bits of family history are preserved in photographs, stories, and records of dates and events. Can you identify any legends, myths, or other stories that are important to your family?

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Buried Treasure!

It was almost dark on a chilly fall evening in 1843 when a federal paymaster and his guards stopped at an inn near McGregor on their way to Fort Atkinson. The paymaster, a tall, thin man who was about 50, was heavily armed. His saddle bags held $63,000 in gold coins to pay soldiers stationed at forts in the prairie territory.

While eating at the inn, the paymaster suddenly lurched to his feet sputtering, "I...I think I'm going to die!" He clutched the money containers and bolted from the inn. Ten minutes later he reappeared in the doorway, then slumped to the floor—dead. The gold was gone. To this day people hunt for the treasure, but no trace of it has been found. GF

This tale generates many questions. It's estimated that the gold would have weighed 235 pounds. How could the paymaster have carried—and hidden—such a heavy load of gold in just 10 minutes? Why didn't he ask the guards to help hide the gold? Had they, perhaps, poisoned him?

Many versions of this story exist, inspired by paymasters carrying hoards of gold over lonely military roads between isolated forts. All versions insist the treasure has never been found. But it's exciting to tell treasure legends, and to hunt for mysterious and lost things. The hope of finding the fortune keeps the stories alive. Maybe the real treasure is the story itself!

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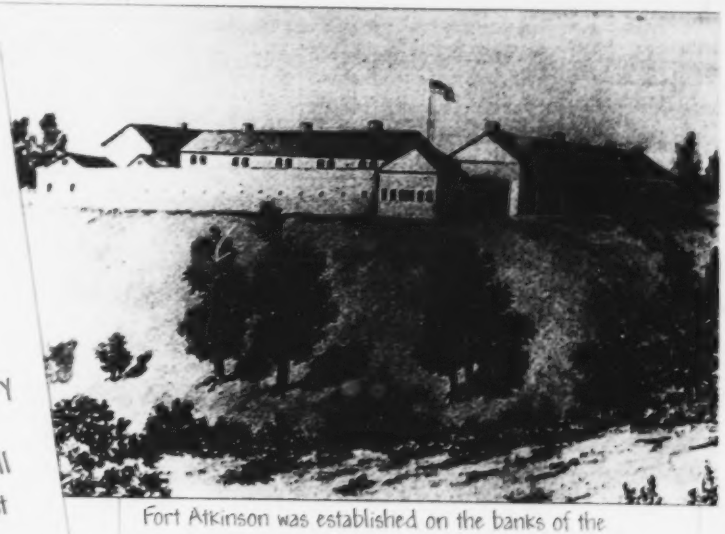
Fact or Fiction?

It's true that, after acquiring the Louisiana Territory from France, the U.S. government built forts to protect settlers moving into the area. We also know that the government established military highways connecting the forts, and that the military road between Forts Atkinson and Crawford (in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin) was the most frequently traveled. Paymasters did travel between forts with gold to pay soldiers. Where there is gold, stories about lost treasures are sure to follow. The questions we can't answer: How much (if any) gold was lost? Have the treasures ever been found?



Fort Atkinson was established on the banks of the Turkey River in 1840. This is how it looked during the years when paymasters transported gold over lonely military roads. Fort Atkinson was the only fort built by the U.S. government to protect one tribe of Indians from another. Today, you can visit the ruins of Fort Atkinson in Winneshiek County.

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What's in a name?

Many places in Iowa have names that come from Indian words. The Wapsipinicon River is one example. Some people believe this explanation of how the Wapsipinicon got its name:

> Wapsipinicon is an Indian word for white potato or swan apple, referring to the white artichokes growing along the river banks.

But legends offer other explanations. What follows is a retelling of one popular legend. The main characters are Indians, but the story itself is probably not an Indian story. Why? One clue is found in the names of the Indian tribes represented in the story. "Sac" and "Fox" were names the U.S. government used for the Sauk and Mesquakie tribes, not names the Indians would have used to refer to themselves.

An Indian princess named Wapsi was known for her grace and beauty. She was the favorite daughter of the Sac chief, Good Heart. One winter the Sac Indians were attacked by the Dakota. The Sac sent word to their allies, the Fox, who immediately came to help.

Pinicon, a handsome young brave, came with the Fox Indians. Pinicon and his father, the elderly chief, led their tribe in war against the Dakota. Together, the Sac and Fox warriors drove the Dakota out of the region.

A feast was held to celebrate the victory. When the Fox returned to camp, Pinicon stayed behind, for he and Wapsi had fallen in love. They stole off by themselves to drift in their canoe on the river and talk of their future together.

Suddenly an arrow pierced the peaceful night and struck deep into Pinicon's heart. Pinicon fell from the canoe into the river. Wapsi sprang to his aid, and she, too, tumbled into the water. Wapsi and Pinicon sank to their deaths as the jealous brave who had wanted Wapsi for his own bride—and who shot Pinicon—hid in the bushes and watched.

Several versions of this legend are told, but they all claim that if you stand very still on the banks of the Wapsipinicon, you can hear the whispers of the lovers in the river that bears their names.

Remember: Sac and Fox are names that were commonly used by white people for the Sauk and Mesquakie tribes. The **Dakota** are part of the Sioux nation.

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The Story of a Family Tree

by Katherine House

Richard Shelley worked quickly during the summer of 1862 to harvest his crops before leaving to fight in the Civil War. A superstitious man, Shelley hung the scythe he used to cut crops in the fork of an oak tree on his eastern Iowa farm. He told his family to leave it there. His fear: if they took the scythe down, he would not come home.

Shelley enlisted in the 24th Iowa Volunteer Infantry on August 18, 1862. Ten days later, he left his wife, four sons, and a daughter to support the Yankee cause. The oldest child was 8 years old when Shelley left; the youngest was 13 months.

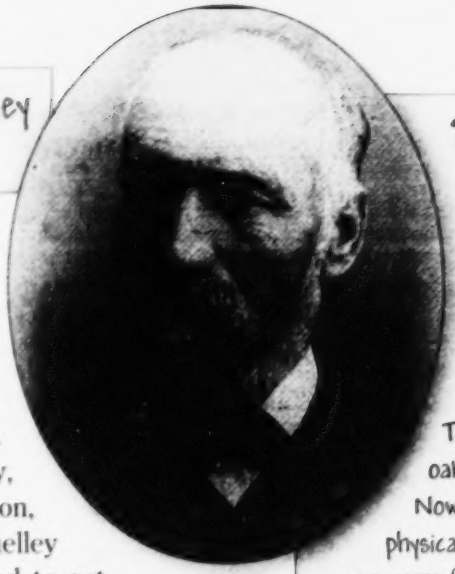
Shelley's unit fought in battles throughout the South, including those at Vicksburg and Jackson, Mississippi. He was captured by the Confederates at the Battle of Cedar Creek, Virginia, on October 19, 1864, and sent to Libby Prison in Richmond. When he was released, he rejoined his unit.

The scythe remained undisturbed in the tree, a symbol of Shelley's absence from his family, and of the hope he would return home safely. Shelley mustered out of the Union army on July 17, 1865. He'd been gone almost three years, and when he finally reached home, no one could remove the blade because the tree had grown around it! Over the next 126 years, the oak tree grew considerably larger—and the story became embedded in the Shelley family heritage just as the scythe was embedded in the tree.

Although Shelley sold the farm in 1901, his descendants often repeated the story and visited the farm to see the scythe in the tree.

scythe: a long-handled tool with a curved blade used for mowing or reaping

Richard Thornton Shelley
1858-1918



It was during such a visit in August 1998 that some of Shelley's relatives discovered the tree had blown down in a severe storm two months earlier. That's when Ray Shelley, Richard's great-great-grandson, and other members of the Shelley family realized they needed to act quickly to save this important piece of their past. The tree was a connection to Richard Shelley they did not want to lose. Ray paid the current owners of the farm $1,200 for a large section of the oak, including the embedded scythe. He donated the tree to the Iowa County Historical Society so it can be displayed in the society's museum, along with information about the Shelley family. For Christmas in 1998, he gave each of his children a small piece of the tree so they can keep the family legend alive. GF

This 24th Iowa Volunteer Infantry Civil War campaign medal belonged to Richard Shelley.

PHOTOS COURTESY DENNIS BELL

Sometimes legends are as close as your own family. That's what Ray Shelley discovered as a kid when, in the late 1950s, his grandparents told him about the family tree. They weren't talking about a diagram of his ancestors. Instead, they described how his great-great-grandfather, Richard Thornton Shelley, left his mark on an oak tree on the family farm near Marengo.

Now, Ray sees the scythe in the tree as a physical part of his heritage, "proof of where we came from." He says, "I can reach out and touch something my [great-great-] grandfather put there." For him, the legend has special meaning. Like his ancestor, Ray knows what it is like to be away from his family to serve his country. He spent 22 years in the Iowa National Guard. "I know the sacrifices I made....I know the doubts I had about whether I would return....It brought me closer to him because I know how he suffered and the loneliness he felt."

Shelley's advice for *Goldfinch* readers: ask your parents and grandparents about life as far back as they can remember. Find out if they helped in World War I or World War II, or if they served in the military since then. Did your family immigrate to the United States? Has Iowa always been your family's home? "If you don't ask your elders, you are never going to know your heritage," he says. "Write it down and preserve it. If you don't ask, you'll never know what will slip away."

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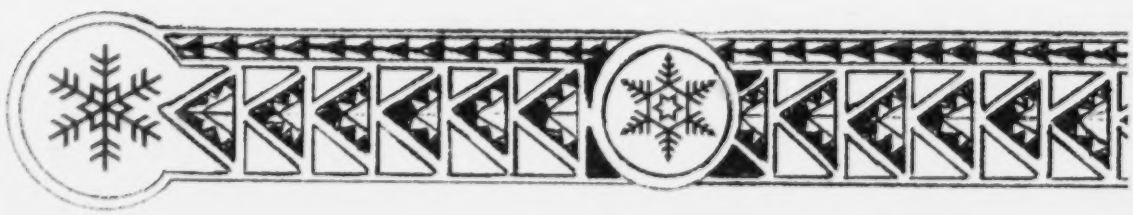
Sacred Stories Preserve Ancient Traditions

American Indian myths have been passed from one generation to the next for thousands of years. The stories are considered sacred and are usually told, not written.

Johnathan Buffalo grew up hearing the sacred stories of the Mesquakie Indians. Now, as tribal historian, he has written down many of the ancient stories to help students at the Sac and Fox Settlement School near Tama learn about Mesquakie culture and history. Stories such as the one that follows about the creation of the Red Earth People link the Mesquakie with their heritage. Sacred stories help the Mesquakie children know who they are. Knowing their history will help them pass on what it means to be Mesquakie to future generations.



Red Earth People

A long time ago, after the Creator had made the land and everything on it, he made the People. He formed them from clay that was as rich and red as the reddest blood. And the People were of that color of red. After he made the People, he told them that he had made them out of the red earth...he told them they would be called Mesquakie, Red Earth People. Since that time and up to the present, the People the Creator had made are known as Mesquakie—Red Earth People.

The Creator then taught the Mesquakie everything they needed to live—how to hunt, grow crops, gather food. He taught them how to make their houses, clothing and tools. He also taught them rules on

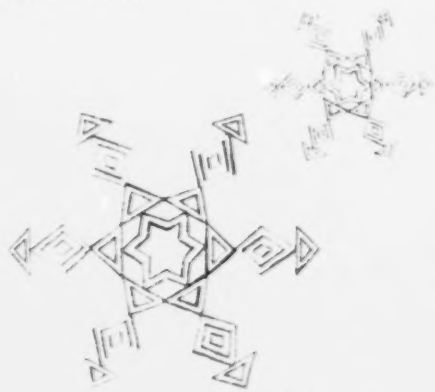
sacred—holy, having to do with religious beliefs, worthy of great respect

how to live. He taught them how to sing and dance. Even the feelings the people had were those of the Creator. It was as if the People were like their Creator and the Creator was like his People.

When all was done and everything was taught, the Creator told the Mesquakie that he was going to leave them. He told them that he would go up north where it was always winter, but that he would come down once a year to see how the people were and what the world he had made was like—and how to know him as he was coming. He would come as the first snows of winter. So the Creator left his People by the sea where the Mesquakie lived for many years, living the way of life that they had been taught.

—*Johnathan Buffalo*

According to Buffalo, Mesquakie legends tell of an early home by the great sea in the east. It's believed this home was along the St. Lawrence River in Canada. After relocating several times due to pressures from enemy tribes, European-American traders and settlers, and French, British, and American governments, the Mesquakie combined their money and purchased land in Iowa in 1850. Located near Tama, the Mesquakie settlement differs from a reservation because the Mesquakie—not the government—own and control the land.



The Goldfinch

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Little Brother Snares the Sun

In 1840, U.S. soldiers relocated the Winnebago to reservation land in Iowa. Six years later, they were forced to move from Iowa to South Dakota. This example of a Winnebago myth explains how people, not animals, became chiefs in the world.

At the beginning when the earth was new, the animals were the chiefs. They were more powerful than humans, whom they hunted, killed, and ate. Finally they killed all the people except one girl and her little brother, who lived in hiding.

"Sister, are there no other people in this world?" he asked one day.

"There may be others," she said, "but we don't dare go looking for them. Terrible animals would stalk and kill us."

But Little Brother was consumed with curiosity. So when his sister went off to gather food, he set out to look for other humans. He walked a long time but met neither people nor animals. He got so tired that he lay down in a spot where the sun had melted the snow away. While he was sleeping, the sun rose and shot fiery rays upon Little Brother. Waking up, the boy found that the feather robe he was wearing had scorched and tightened around him so that he couldn't move. To free himself he had to tear it apart. It was ruined! He shook his fists and shouted, "Sun, I'll get even! Don't you think you're so high that I can't get at you!"

Angry and sad, Little Brother returned home. He wept when he told his sister how the sun had spoiled his feather robe. After fasting for twenty days, he told his sister to make a snare for him to catch the sun. She went out and gathered many secret things and twisted them into a strong cord.

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Little Brother waited until the middle of the night, when it is darkest. He went out and found the hole in the sky through which the sun would rise, and at its entrance he set his snare. When the sun came up at the usual time, it was caught and held fast. There was no light or warmth that day.

Even though the animals were the chiefs, they were afraid. They called a council of all their elders and talked for a long time. At last they decided that the biggest and most fearsome of all the animals should go and gnaw through the cord holding the sun. This animal was a Dormouse, who was not small, as she is now, but big as a mountain.

Dormouse went to the place where the sun rises and found him in the snare. The sun had grown hotter as he struggled to free himself. As Dormouse approached, the hair on her back smoked and was singed off, but she crouched down and began to gnaw at the cord. She chewed and chewed and after a long time managed to bite it in two.

Freed at last, the sun rose at once and made everything bright again. But the heat had shriveled Dormouse down to her present size, and the sun's rays had half blinded her. Although brave Dormouse had freed the sun, everybody realized that Little Brother, who had snared the sun, was the wisest being in this world, and the one with the greatest power. Since that time the humans have been the chiefs over the animals, the hunters instead of the hunted.

Sioux Myths

Like other Indians, the Sioux believed they came from the soil. The first man drew himself up from the soil, fighting for his freedom. Sunshine hardened the earth and strengthened the man. Their nation sprang from the first man and claimed the great plains as their own.

Sioux myths also explain how behavior such as deceit and trickery came about. According to the Sioux, Ictinike is the son of the sun god. When Ictinike offended his father, he was banned from the celestial regions. Indians say Ictinike taught them all the evil things they know, and they regard him as a Father of Lies.

-by Benton Sen

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Finding the Future in the Past

Settling near others from their own country was one way early immigrants found comfort and safety. It also kept their traditions alive.

In the case of many Czechoslovakian immigrants, that area was in and around Cedar Rapids. Repeating myths and legends was an important way of keeping in touch with their past, both with their own ancestors and the culture they left behind.

One legend explains why the lion on the Czech coat of arms has two tails. A retold version follows.

A brave Knight named Bruncvik set out to win for himself and his country a great prize, which he could bear on his coat of arms as an emblem. He ended up on an island filled with shipwrecks and skeletons, which Bruncvik realized too late meant that no one was ever allowed to leave.

Bruncvik saw a giant bird coming to the island and carrying off dead horses. Hiding himself in a horsehide, Bruncvik was carried in the bird's huge talons to its nest, from which he escaped before he could be eaten.

Traveling on, he came upon a furious battle between a lion and a dragon. The lion was tired and near defeat. Bruncvik jumped into the fight to slay the dragon, after which he tended the lion's wounds. The lion became his faithful companion and accompanied him on his quest to fight the forces of evil, hate, envy, and greed.

One day, Bruncvik and the lion came upon the Black Rock of Darkness which was, in reality, an evil sorcerer with a powerful, magic sword that could crush anything it touched. The sorcerer challenged the brave knight to a battle. The lion, in an attempt to divert the sorcerer's attention from Bruncvik, was struck by the sword, which split his tail in two parts. Ever since, the Czech Lion has had two tails.

Bruncvik used his shield as a mirror to blind the evil sorcerer, who dropped his magic sword. Bruncvik picked it up and used it to destroy the Black Rock of Darkness. As it crumbled, a spring of water burst forth. In the water, a beautiful princess began to appear. Her face was the Vitava River. Her hair was the houses on both sides of the river. The magic sword became the Prague Bridge, where Bruncvik and his lion stand guard forever.

To this day, Czech legend has it that one of the bridge's pillars contains Prince Bruncvik's magic sword.

Lions are an important symbol among Czechs. Near the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library in Cedar Rapids is a bridge called The Bridge of Lions (pictured above). It links two sides of a river, and also links us to the memory of Iowa's Czech immigrants.

Iowa is home to people representing many cultures, which are preserved in the stories people tell. Check into the stories of your heritage. They meant a lot to your ancestors...once upon a time.

-by Jill Esbaum

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Gunfight at the O.K. Corral

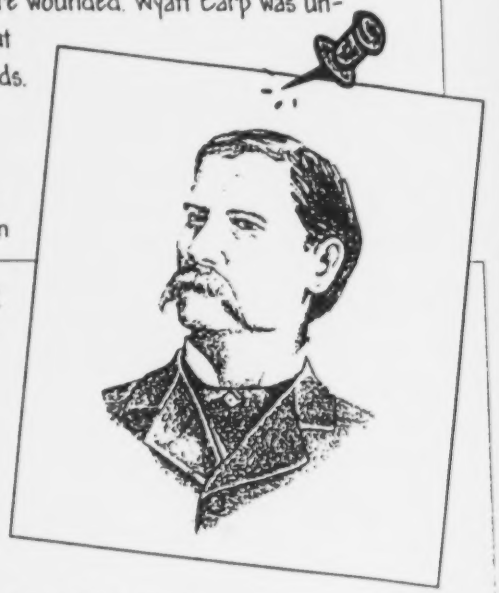
The place: Tombstone, Arizona. The date: October 26, 1881. Two sets of brothers, Tom and Frank McLaury and Ike and Billy Clanton, are in town. Tombstone Marshal Virgil Earp suspects them of horse rustling. After a confrontation in a Tombstone saloon, Virgil calls upon his brothers, Wyatt and Morgan, and a friend John H. "Doc" Holliday, to defeat the dreaded outlaws.

Virgil and Wyatt walked down Fremont Street near the O.K. Corral. Wyatt advised Doc to hide his gun under his coat. Virgil, who wanted to disarm the outlaws, confronted them and said, "Boys, throw up your hands, I want your guns." But Wyatt was overheard saying, "You have been looking for a fight, now you can have one."

Bullets flew. Ike Clanton grabbed Wyatt's arm to stop him from firing. "This fight has commenced," Wyatt said, pushing Clanton aside. "Go to fighting, or get away."

When the gunfight ended, the McLaury brothers and Billy Clanton were dead. Ike Clanton ran away. Virgil, Morgan, and Doc were wounded. Wyatt Earp was unharmed. The shootout lasted only 30 seconds. But the Old West legend born at the O.K. Corral lives on.

-by Benton Sen



Did you know?

Wyatt Earp, one of the legendary heroes of the Gunfight at the O.K. Corral, grew up in Pella, Iowa.

Earp, who farmed with his father, ran away to enlist in the army when he was 15. His father soon found him and sent him back to their Pella cornfields. A year later, the Earp family left Iowa for southern California because Wyatt's father disagreed with Iowa's position on the slave issue: the elder Earp thought slaves should not be freed. Wyatt received his first gun prior to the journey and kept the wagon train of 40 families supplied with fresh meat.

When Wyatt was 22, he moved to Lamar, Missouri, married, and became a lawman. When his wife died of typhoid fever, Wyatt drifted in and out of odd jobs in Kansas, Texas, Wyoming, and Arizona. He became a buffalo hunter, policeman, deputy sheriff, assistant marshal, gambler, railroad worker, stagecoach driver, and rancher. He married again at age 60 and became a prospector during the Alaska Gold Rush. Wyatt eventually returned to California and worked in the motion picture industry until he died in 1929. Best remembered as a fearless frontier lawman, the Pella farm boy became a national legend.

-by Barbara Cairns

Full Name: Wyatt Berry Stapp Earp (named after his father's commanding officer in the Mexican War)

Parents: Virginia Ann Cooksey and Nicholas Porter Earp

Born: March 19, 1848, in Monmouth, Illinois

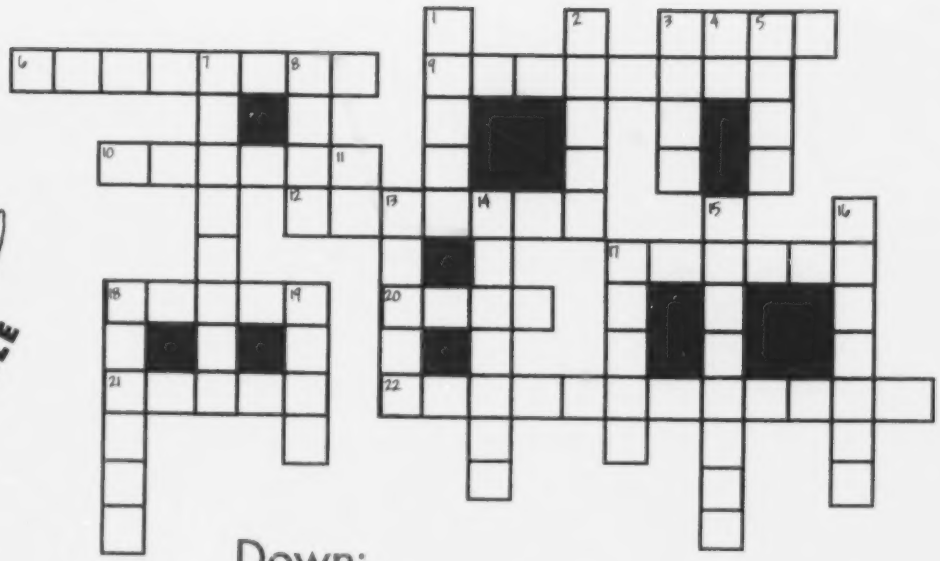
Moved to Iowa: 1850

Siblings: James, Virgil, Martha, Morgan, Warren, and Anna.

GF

MYTHS & LEGENDS

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



Across:

3. Solitary; by itself. Richard Shelley left his mark on a _____ oak tree.
6. University of Okoboji's legendary football team.
9. The Father of Lies according to Sioux legend.
10. A great story may take your _____ away.
12. Record of past facts and events.
17. Safe to eat.
18. River that was home to Iowa's sea monster.
20. Midday.
21. Bring about or produce. She hoped her research would _____ good results.
22. An ancient art that brings people together.

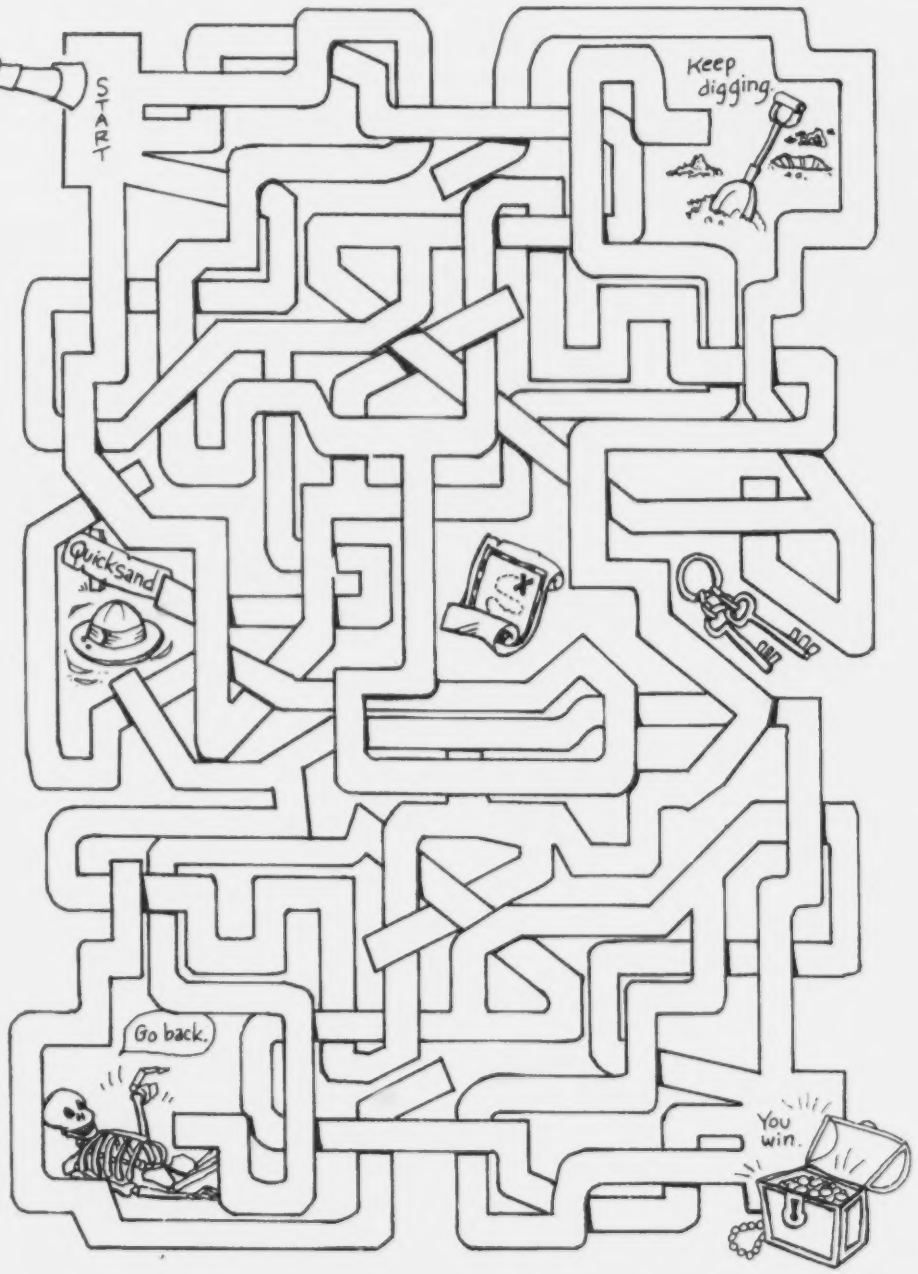
Down:

1. George Hull's stone hoax: The Cardiff _____.
2. Personal record of daily life.
3. Legendary Czech animal with two tails.
4. Site of a gunfight involving Wyatt Earp: The ___ Corral.
5. Yesterday's ____ offers clues for solving history mysteries!
7. Buried wealth. It could be gold–or a great story!
8. A story symbolizing basic truths in a community.
11. Greeting.
13. Stories set to music.
14. Location of northern Iowa's mythical university.
15. Event in U.S. history that inspired many legends.
16. Stories that start with a fact or event in history–then grow!
17. Mesquakie means Red _____ People.
18. Tool for mowing.
19. *Goldfinch* readers who love history.

YOU CAN GO BENEATH AN OVERPASS, BUT IF YOU HIT A DEAD END, TRY AGAIN!

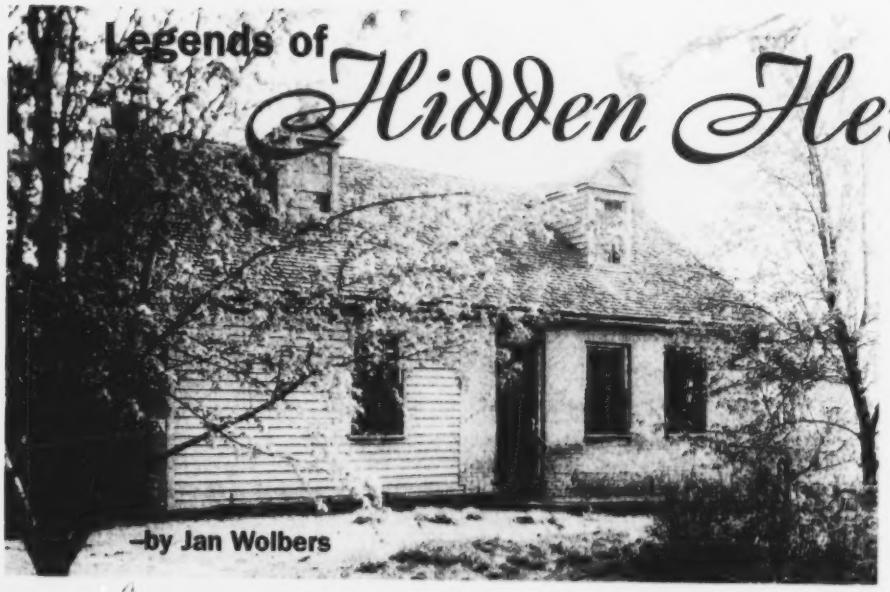
THE AMAZING HISTORY HUNT

Looking for clues in a history mystery is a lot like hunting for buried treasure. Your research may start with a "map" —a person, place, idea, or event you want to learn more about. The hunt for history will involve phone calls and leg work. It may lead you on a meandering course through libraries, archives, courthouses, or internet web sites. Along the way you'll meet interesting people with great stories to tell. Don't worry if you hit a dead end. That's the sign to start digging deeper.



Answers on page 31

Legends of Hidden Heroes



–by Jan Wolbers

If walls could talk, Gayla Young's house in Denmark, Iowa, would whisper stories about brave men and women who risked their lives for freedom and about the people who helped them along their way.

Young's house was built in 1838 by Deacon Theron Trowbridge, who followed abolitionist Asa Turner to Denmark. The two men left Quincy, Illinois, because of the townspeople's views on slavery. Denmark, shaped by Turner's influence, became a center for abolitionists.

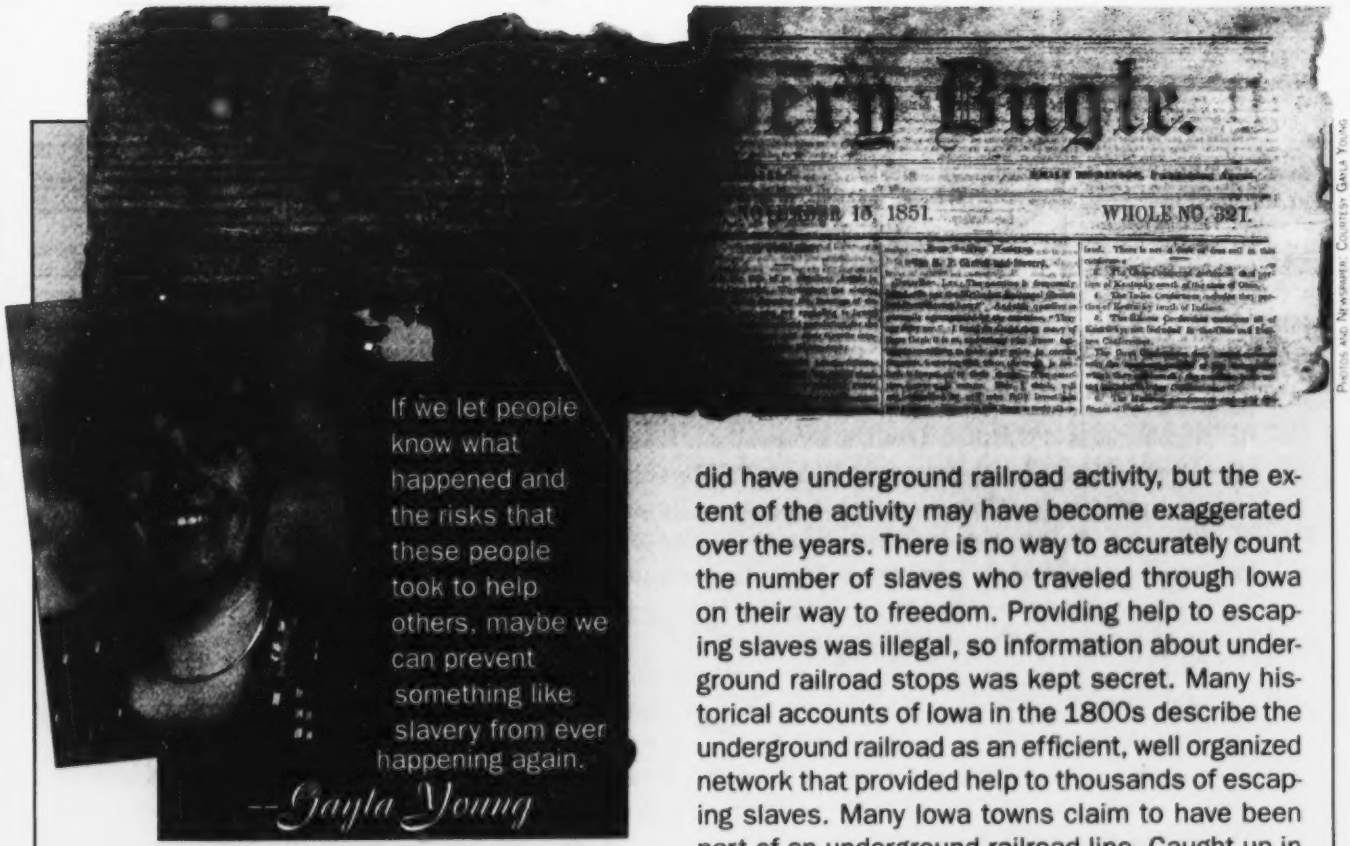
Trowbridge built a small bookcase in the upstairs bedroom that hid a small opening leading to a crawlspace approximately 10 feet long, 4 feet wide, and 3 feet high. Trowbridge was a plasterer by trade, and he cleverly sloped the interior walls so that the extra space was not noticeable from outside the little room.

Young's grandparents, Bob and Ethel Riddle, purchased the home in the 1940s after it had been vacant for years. They discovered the secret room while replacing the roof. They found the crawlspace from the outside, then went inside and discovered how to reach it through the bookcase.

The secret room held crumbling proof that the room was once used to hide runaway slaves. The Riddles discovered old clothing, including a shirt and shoes. They also found a yellowed copy of the *Anti-Slavery Bugle* newspaper from Salem, Ohio, dated 1851. The little room probably served as a hiding place for slaves who came north from Missouri on their way to freedom. Hiding fugitive slaves was a tremendous risk for the homeowner, who would have been imprisoned if caught. "Trowbridge was a married man with children," Young said. "To risk his family like he did showed that he had a strong religious belief that slavery was wrong."

Gayla purchased the house from her grandparents in 1987 and still lives there with her family. "There are times that I would like to sell it and move to a newer house," she said, "but this house is a part of history." As a third grade teacher, Gayla is concerned that students understand and remember this country's struggle to free the slaves. "Kids have a hard time understanding the need for the underground railroad; they only see history through the movies. But if we let people know what happened and the risks that these people took to help others, maybe we can prevent something like slavery from ever happening again."

abolitionist: person opposed to slavery



PHOTOS AND NEWSPAPER: COURTESY GAYLA YOUNG

Iowa's Underground Railroad

The underground railroad was a lifeline to the enslaved men and women of the south. It was a loosely organized group of abolitionists who helped runaway slaves escape the south to reach Canada (and freedom) in the 1800s. Stops on **underground** railroad lines consisted of homes, barns, shrubbery—hiding places of any kind where abolitionists hid the slaves along their journey northward. While the underground railroad didn't actually have passenger cars running on tracks, it was a way to move people from one place to another.

The underground railroad is a good example of how events from history grow into legends. Iowa **did have underground railroad activity, but the extent of the activity may have become exaggerated over the years. There is no way to accurately count the number of slaves who traveled through Iowa on their way to freedom. Providing help to escaping slaves was illegal, so information about underground railroad stops was kept secret. Many historical accounts of Iowa in the 1800s describe the underground railroad as an efficient, well organized network that provided help to thousands of escaping slaves. Many Iowa towns claim to have been part of an underground railroad line. Caught up in the legend, many homeowners believed that root cellars, hidden rooms, or large cupboards in their homes must have hidden slaves.**

Chances are, however, that most root cellars stored food, not slaves, and the secret rooms and cupboards were probably built for reasons completely unrelated to slavery.

Although there is no evidence to support that the underground railroad in Iowa was widespread or organized, there certainly were some well-established stops in the state. Evidence such as the items found in Gayla Young's house offers proof of the network's activity in Iowa. The legends inspired by the underground railroad help to keep history's heroes alive. GF

underground. Meant: hidden or secret-not beneath the earth!

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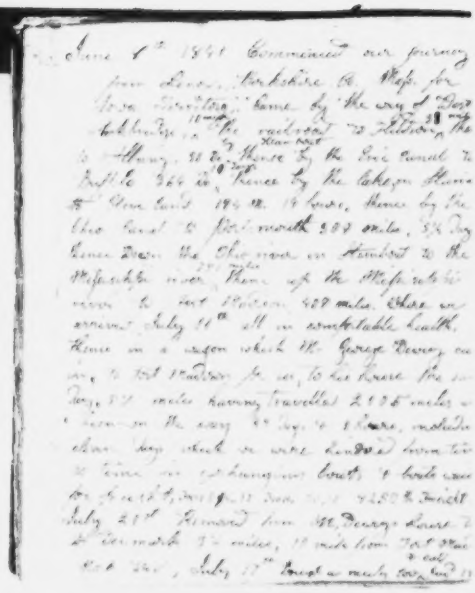
Dear Diary...



Nathan Isbell, Jr., and his wife, Sophia, warned their daughter, Sophronia, never to go into the woodshed on their property in Denmark, Iowa. One day when Sophronia was 10 years old (probably in 1844), she disobeyed and found two black men on a straw bed in the corner. Then, for the first time, she understood what her father was doing. He operated a "station" on the underground railroad! Stories of his efforts to help escaped slaves have been passed down like treasures to generations of Nathan Isbell's family. According to family accounts, Isbell made frequent trips into Missouri (a slave state) to distribute Bibles and other religious literature. While in Missouri, he hid one or two escaped slaves in his false-bottomed wagon and took them back to Iowa, where they hid in his woodshed until the next connection on the escape route led them further north toward freedom.

Helping escaped slaves was risky business for Isbell, but he kept at it until his death in 1856. One way to confirm Isbell's work as an abolitionist is to look through his diary. It's filled with entries recording details of his daily life, from what he planted to how much he paid for a pair of boots for one of his sons. A few of the entries are reprinted here. We haven't changed Isbell's spelling or punctuation, so you might find a few "mistakes." See if you can find a clue in Isbell's diary about his work with the underground railroad.

June 1841

8th Commenced our journey from Lenox, Berkshire Co., Mass. for Iowa Territory. Came by the way of West Stockbridge, 10 miles. The railroad to Hudson, 38 miles, thence to Albany, 30 miles by steamboat. Thence by the Erie Canal to Buffalo, 10 days, thence by the lake, on steamboat to Cleveland, 194 miles. 19 hours. Thence by the Ohio Canal to Portsmouth, 309 miles, 5 ½ days. Thence down the Ohio River in Steamboat to the Mississippi river to Fort Madison, 409 miles. Where we arrived July 11th all in comfortable health. Thence in a wagon which Mr. George Dewey came in, to Fort Madison for us, to his house the same day 5 ½ miles having travelled 2105 miles and been on the way 33 days and 3 hours, including eleven days which we were hindered from time to time in [changing] boats & boats waiting for freight. Fare $96.33 Food 20.75 4250 lbs freight $117.40

July 1841

21st Removed from Mr. Dewey's house to Denmark, 3 ½ miles. 10 miles from Ft. Madison...

June 1848

6th A white frost

8th Went to Salem to help drive off the slave catchers

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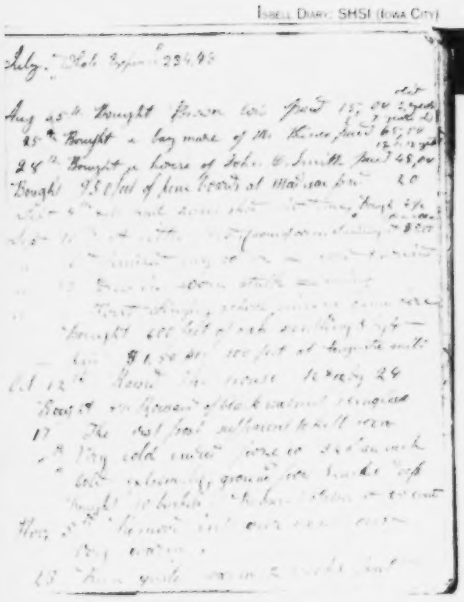
Be a diary detective!


Isbell Diary, SHSI (Iowa City)

9th returned from Salem

October 1848
9th Mormon Temple burnt at Nauvoo

May 1850
13th Underground railroad got a passenger from Missouri

November 1850
12th Commenced again distributing Bibles
18th Bot George boots; paid $1.50

May 1851
17th Hailstorm, broke much glass

July 1851
18th Cholera prevails, 5 died today

Nathan Isbell, Jr., was born in Massachusetts in 1801. For many years, he farmed and operated a saw mill. In 1841, when he was 40 years old, Isbell sold his farm and mill, pinning his hopes for a better life on the promise of the far west—Iowa Territory. Isbell wrote in his diary from 1830 until about 1855. His handwriting deteriorates over the years, and the last six pages of the diary were cut away. Most of the entries in Isbell's diary are only one or two lines long. In what is perhaps his longest entry, Isbell writes about how he and his wife, along with their seven children, travelled to Iowa. To learn more about Isbell, study his diary entries again, and then answer the questions below.

❶ Sometimes when people talk about historical myths, they're talking about things many people believe about historical events but that aren't really true. One common myth about Iowa history is that all immigrants to this area came by covered wagons. How does Isbell's diary challenge that popular belief? _____

_____

_____

❷ If it's true that Isbell made frequent trips into Missouri to pick up passengers for the underground railroad, why do you think he didn't write about it more often in his diary?

_____

_____

_____

❸ Are you surprised that Isbell mentions his abolitionist work at all in the diary? Why or why not?_____

_____

_____

❹ Why do you think Isbell didn't want his children to know about his work with the underground railroad? _____

_____

_____

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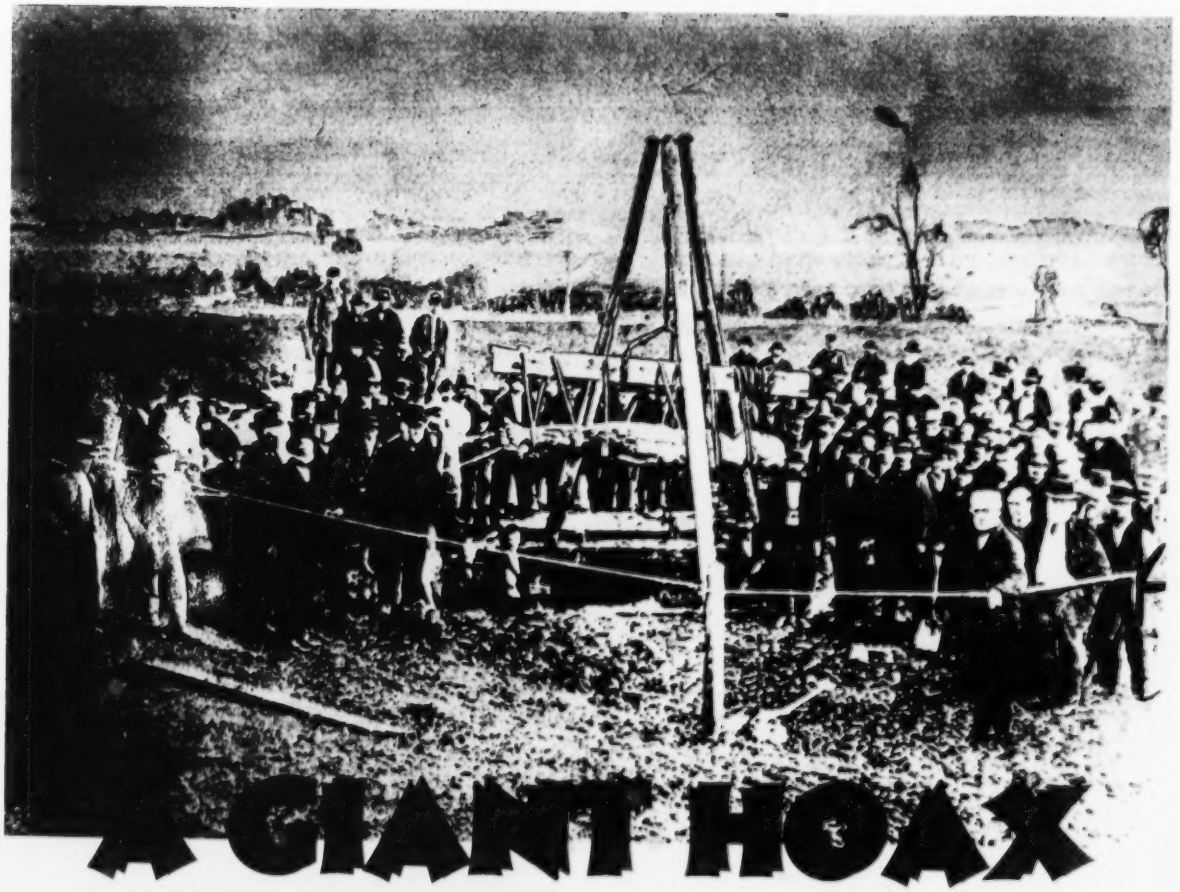

A GIANT HOAX

More than 130 years ago, a five-ton block of gypsum left Fort Dodge concealed beneath a veil of lies.

In 1866, George Hull, a tobacco farmer and cigar maker from Connecticut, was in Ackley, Iowa visiting his sister. He had the reputation of a villain—and some accounts say he even looked the part, with a black moustache and beard and wearing black from hat to boots. Described as an athiest, he reluctantly accompanied his sitster to the Methodist Church in Ackley where he listened to Reverend Turk preach a revival sermon that mentioned the Bible verse Genesis 6:4—"There were giants on the earth in those days..."

Hull and Turk later argued about how to interpret that passage. The result: Hull conceived a scheme to fool people with a giant carved of stone. And he hoped to make money on the side.

Hull and an Iowa friend went to Fort Dodge in 1868 to obtain a block of gypsum 12 feet long, 4 feet wide and 2 feet thick. People in Fort Dodge became suspicious of the two mud-splattered strangers who

Photo: Courtesy of the New York State Historical Association, Cooperstown, N.Y.

were spending so much time in stone quarries. Hull told curious onlookers that the goliath-sized block of gypsum was to be placed on exhibition in Washington as an example of "the best building stone in the world." But the story often changed. Hull also claimed the block was Iowa's gift to a Lincoln memorial in Washington. Or that it was for a monument in New York that would be made of contributions from quarries representing each state in the Union. It took several weeks of persuasion, grueling work, and a few bribes to dig Hull's 10,000-pound block of gypsum out of the ground.

Hull hired Edward Burkhardt, a stone cutter in Chicago, to turn the gypsum into a prehistoric giant. The problem was getting the stone to the artist. The immense size and weight of the gypsum exhausted teams of horses and broke wagons and bridges along the 40-mile trip to a railroad. The block had to be cut smaller along the way to lighten the load.

In Chicago, Burkhardt and his assistants secretly carved the block into a figure which resembled Hull. The giant emerged from the stone looking as though he had died in agony. The artists simulated skin pores by pounding the stone with a hammer embedded with needle-like points. Blue veins in the stone became the petrified veins of an ancient man. A sulfuric acid bath turned the statue dingy brown. Hull himself spent countless hours rubbing the statue with a sponge, water, and sand to remove chisel marks and create the illusion that the giant had aged for centuries in the earth.

THE GIANT EMERGED FROM THE STONE LOOKING AS THOUGH HE HAD DIED IN AGONY.

The giant was crated and hauled to a relative's farm near Cardiff, New York. It cost Hull about $2,200 to create, transport, and bury his giant in the ground between roots of an old elm tree on "Stub" Newell's farm so it would look like it had been there forever. A year later, Newell showed two hired men where to dig a well on the farm. In the process, they "discovered" the giant.

Scientists pondered the discovery while people flocked to Newell's farm for a chance to see the giant—for a 50-cent admission fee. Eating places and stagecoach runs sprang up to feed and transport tourists. Some thought it looked like an Indian. Or George Washington. A graduate student at Yale, Alexander McWhorter, claimed the figure was the Phoenician god Baal. He even found pictorial inscriptions on the statue (which no one else could see) and translated them.

Hull reportedly made $3 million before his giant was proven a hoax. Then, Hull eagerly took credit for the deception, gloating over his ability to fool so many people. GF

Some legends—like this one—are created on purpose, with **hoaxes** (practical jokes to deceive the public) at the core. Other legends evolve on their own over time, inspired by people or events from history.

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The Story Lives On

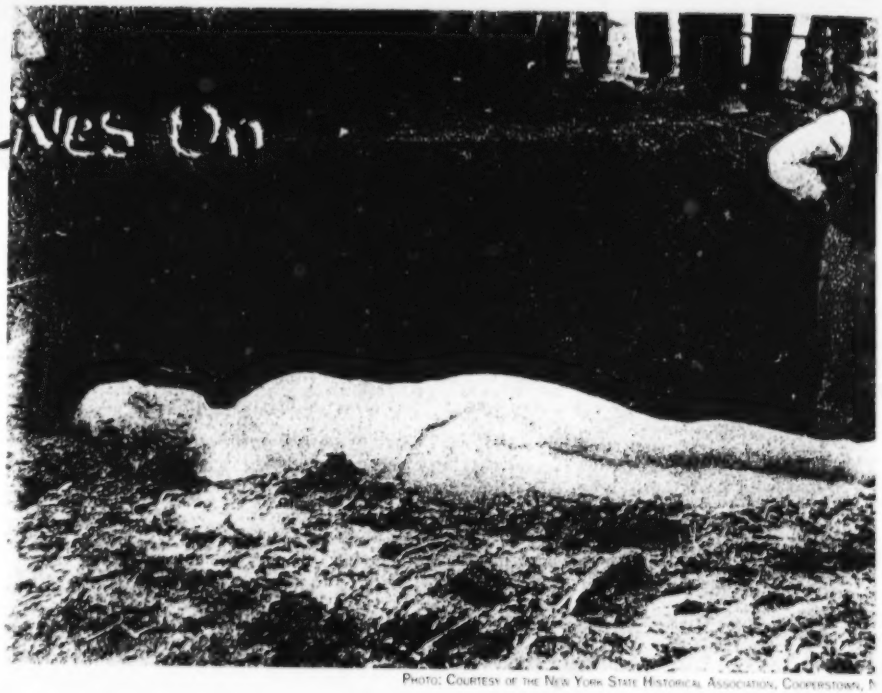

Photo: Courtesy of the New York State Historical Association, Cooperstown, N

Eventually the truth behind Hull's hoax became known. But that didn't kill the story.

"The real Cardiff Giant was as popular after it was discovered to be a hoax as it was before," said Dr. Gilbert T. Vincent, president of the Farmers' Museum in Cooperstown, New York, where the giant is on display.

Paul D'Ambrosio, Farmers' Museum chief curator, believes the giant has generational appeal. "People who saw it at the museum as kids bring their own kids back to see it," he said. The Cardiff Giant, which has intrigued scholars and writers through the decades since the hoax, may make a return trip this summer to Iowa, where it would be on display at the Fort Museum in Fort Dodge.

"It's not an easy piece to transport," said D'Ambrosio. "It's made of porous stone which is not as sturdy as it looks." Moving the giant—now considered an irreplaceable artifact—requires special handling. It takes a fork lift to load and unload the 3,000 pound figure, and the giant has to be packed so it won't rattle and so the weight won't shift (which could damage both the statue and the truck). It's expensive to pack, ship, and insure the Cardiff Giant.

"The giant broke into two pieces many years ago—the legs are separate, which may help in moving the object," D'Ambrosio said. The two pieces fit together so well that viewers don't notice the damage.

Considering what it takes to move the enormous Cardiff Giant today, George Hull's success in transporting the block of gypsum, getting it carved into the likeness of a mythical giant, then secretly burying it on a farm amidst the roots of established trees is all the more amazing.

Even if the real Cardiff Giant doesn't make it back to Fort Dodge, visitors to the Fort Museum can see a replica carved by Cliff Carlson in the late 1960s and early 1970s that is part of the museum's permanent exhibit.

The Fort Museum's copy is not the Cardiff Giant's first clone. Circus promoter P.T. Barnum had a copy carved when his offer to buy the real Cardiff Giant was denied. Owners of the giants went to court to prove which statue was the "real" Cardiff hoax.

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COULD SUCH A GIGANTIC HOAX HAPPEN TODAY?

"Oh, sure!" says Dr. Gilbert T. Vincent, president of the Farmers' Museum in Cooperstown, NY. "Hoaxes go on all the time."

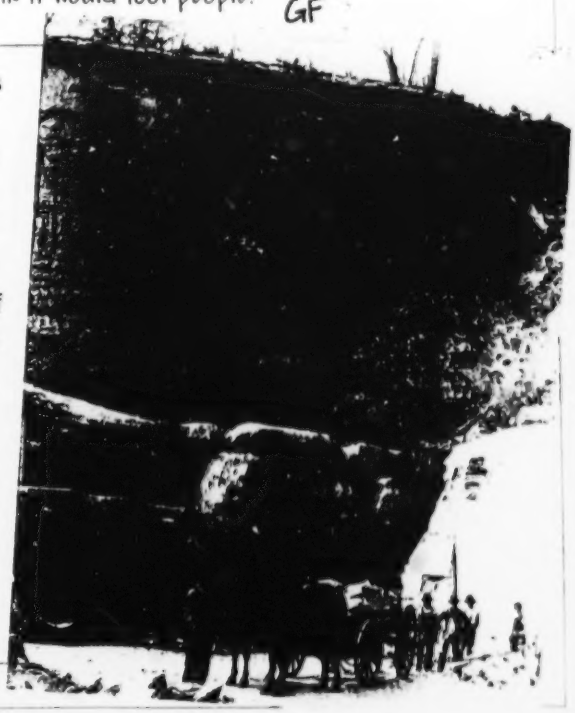
Vincent believes it would be hard to come up with a mythical human figure that would have the same attraction today as the Cardiff Giant had 130 years ago. To be successful, Vincent explained, a hoax must tap into something that's happening at the time. In the late 1800s when George Hull fooled the world with the Cardiff Giant:

- Charles Darwin had just published his theory of evolution.
- Fossilized remains had been discovered while digging the Erie Canal.
- It was a time of religious fervor as people debated the biblical record of time and scientific theories of time. Some religious leaders like Reverend Turk insisted that everything in the Bible, including passages about giants inhabiting the earth, happened exactly as it is described. Others, like Hull, disagreed.

"All the issues being discussed at the time were touched on by the Cardiff Giant," said Vincent. A successful hoax feeds on the moment. "It strikes a chord with what people are thinking about and talking about," Vincent said. People were eager to believe in Hull's creation. The dissenting voices of people who thought it was a hoax from the start were ignored.

It's easy to laugh at the hoax today and at the people who were so easily fooled by a statue carved out of Fort Dodge gypsum. "We can't look back at people in the 19th century with disdain because they believed in the Cardiff Giant hoax," insists Paul D'Ambrosio, Farmers' Museum chief curator. "People today still have the same fascination with the bizarre." He agrees with Vincent: hoaxes happen every day. "People have always believed in things that aren't real," he said. That they believed in the Cardiff Giant is "not that farfetched."

Today, the Cardiff Giant is a monument to one of America's greatest hoaxes. It reminds us that people crave good stories and tall tales, and that legends persist because people want to believe. What kind of hoax would capture the world's attention today? Look at what's in the news to see what people are talking and thinking about. Take computers, for example. Is the Y2K "millennium bug" real? Or could it be an elaborate hoax of Cardiff Giant proportions? Could someone fool the world with images of UFOs? Could someone with an imagination like Hull's create and "discover" the body of an alien who visited the earth centuries ago? Do you think it would fool people? GF



This photo shows gypsum miners working in a Fort Dodge quarry in 1910. In 1868, workers hauled the beginnings of the Cardiff Giant hoax out a Fort Dodge gypsum bed. Where do think the next great hoax will start? Who do you think will start it?

Photo: SHSI (Iowa)

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On the Trail of an Iowa Sea Monster

by Katherine House

You may have heard of the Loch Ness monster, a huge, dinosaur-like creature said to live in a murky Scottish lake. Scientists and ordinary citizens have been trying to track "Nessie" for years. But did you know Iowa had its own sea monster more than 100 years ago, or so a local legend claims?

Hogs were disappearing from James Wright's farm near Oskaloosa along the south bank of the Skunk River. So Wright built a sturdy fence around the feed lot and posted his trusty bulldog there to keep watch. Still, within 20 days, ten of his largest hogs disappeared. Each one weighed between 250 and 400 pounds. And each vanished without a trace. The fence was not damaged, and the watchdog never uttered a growl.

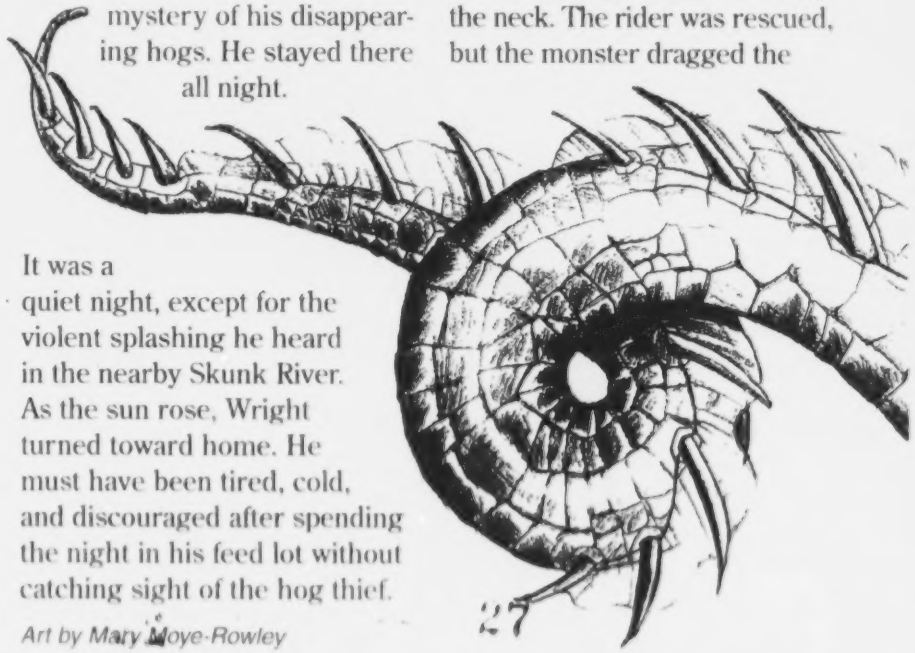
On December 4, 1884, Wright took his rifle and hid near the feed lot, determined to solve the mystery of his disappearing hogs. He stayed there all night.

It was a quiet night, except for the violent splashing he heard in the nearby Skunk River. As the sun rose, Wright turned toward home. He must have been tired, cold, and discouraged after spending the night in his feed lot without catching sight of the hog thief.

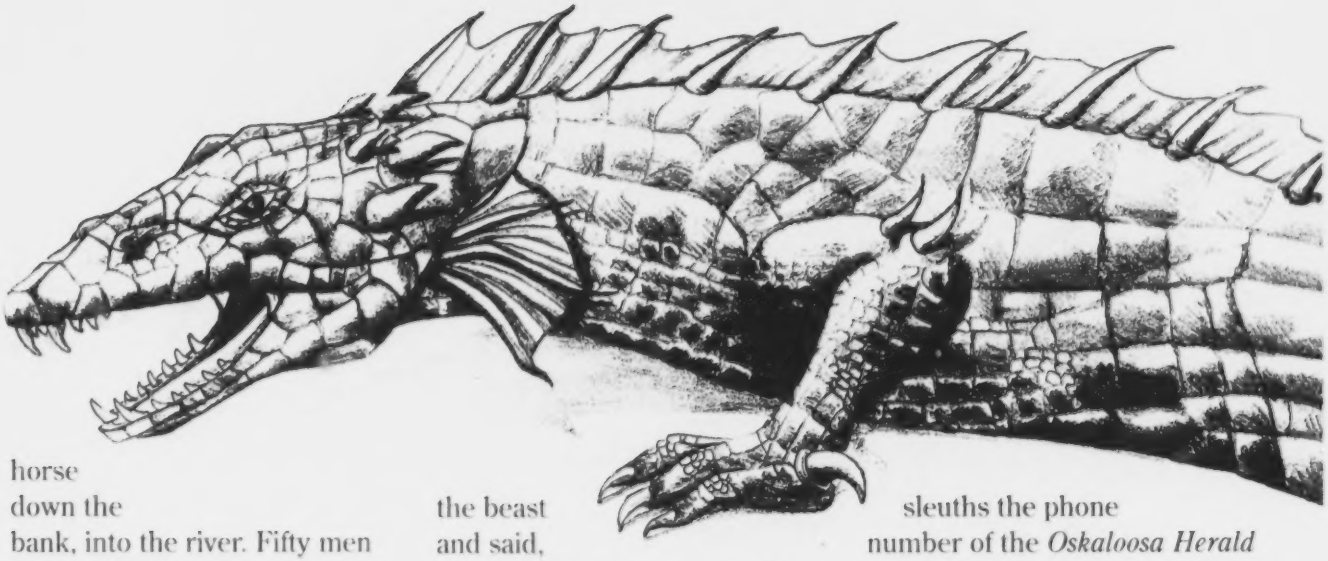
Just then a gigantic creature crept over the river bank. The monster stepped over the fence and grasped a 300-pound hog in its ferocious jaws. The hog disappeared behind 17-inch teeth as the creature plunged back into the water.

Wright told city authorities that the monster's legs were three feet long and thick as a man's body. Its tail alone was 20 feet long.

People hurried to Wright's farm as news of the monster spread. The crowd swelled to 2,000. People cautiously approached the water. Suddenly the beast lunged up the bank, grabbing a horse by the neck. The rider was rescued, but the monster dragged the

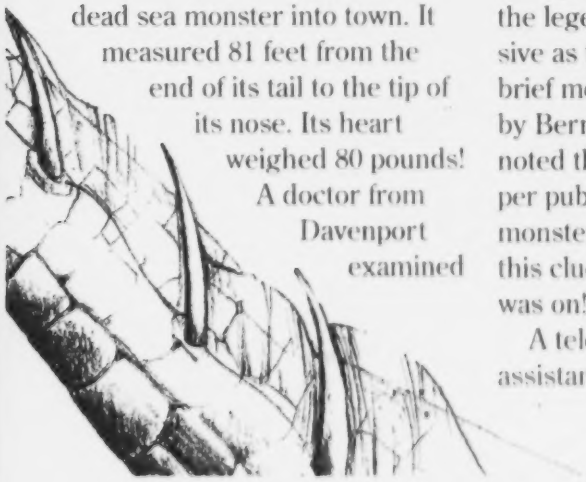


Art by Mary Moye-Rowley



horse down the bank, into the river. Fifty men fired 10,000 shots at the animal, to no avail. Then one of the men ordered a cannon to be loaded with railroad spikes and gunpowder. Before the roar of the cannon died away, a wail, loud and long, came from the water. The monster's head and tail lashed the water, staining the river with blood.

Twelve oxen dragged the dead sea monster into town. It measured 81 feet from the end of its tail to the tip of its nose. Its heart weighed 80 pounds! A doctor from Davenport examined the beast and said, "Gentlemen, this is no cardiff giant....It probably belongs to a species of gigantic lizard supposed to have been extinct many thousand years."

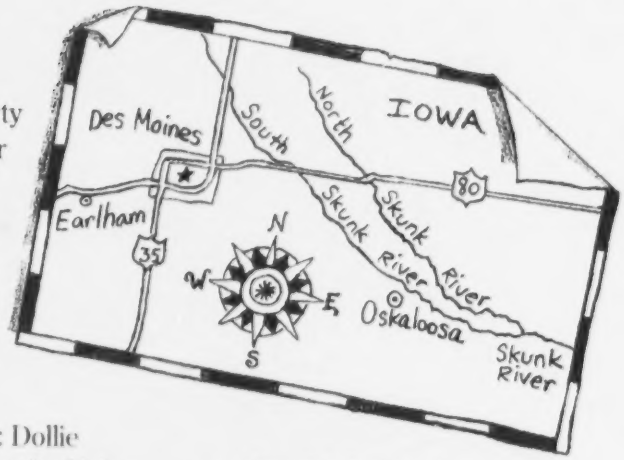


The Goldfinch first discovered the sea monster in an Iowa history book published in the 1960s. But tracking down the original newspaper article that spawned the legend proved nearly as elusive as the monster itself. The brief mention in *Hawkeye Lore*, by Bernice Reida and Ann Irwin, noted that an Oskaloosa newspaper published an account of the monster in the fall of 1884. With this clue, the chase for the story was on!

A telephone call to directory assistance gave *Goldfinch* sleuths the phone number of the *Oskaloosa Herald* newspaper. We called an editor in the *Herald* newsroom. She'd never heard the sea monster story, but provided the names and phone numbers of some local historians who might be able to help.

Next we checked the Oskaloosa library. Unfamiliar with the sea monster story, the staff offered no additional clues. The next contact on our list: Patricia Patterson, one of the people recommended by the newspaper editor. Patterson and her husband, Lloyd, have compiled an index to *Herald* articles. The sea monster search became contagious. "Wild horses couldn't keep us away" from the search, Mrs. Patterson said. When the Pattersons could not

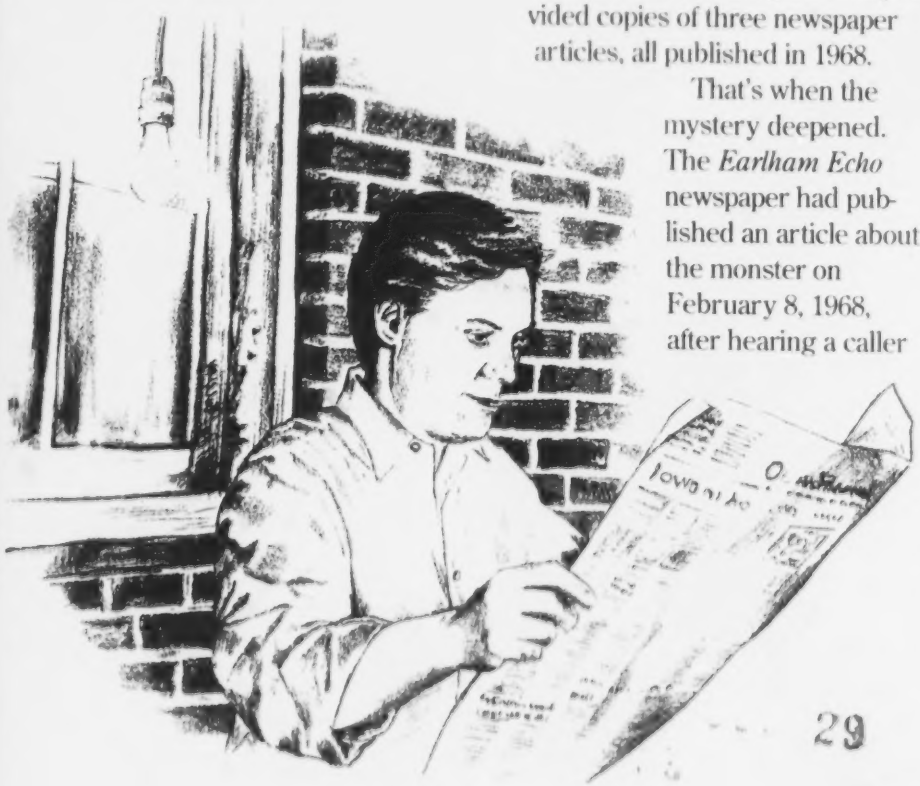
turn up any information on the monster, Mrs. Patterson called a friend who had purchased old copies of the *Herald* from the library when the newspapers were microfilmed. Her friend, too, was captivated by the legend. Puzzling over the story kept him awake at night reading copies of the 1884 *Herald*. He began with the April issues, figuring the sea monster could not have been spotted earlier in the year, when the river was most likely frozen.



The hunting party for the sea monster story was getting larger. The suspense was growing, too. Where would our search lead? What really happened?

The next contact: Dollie BeDillon, archivist at the Nelson Pioneer Farm Museum of the Mahaska County Historical Society. BeDillon knew exactly what we were looking for. She provided copies of three newspaper articles, all published in 1968.

That's when the mystery deepened. The *Earlham Echo* newspaper had published an article about the monster on February 8, 1968, after hearing a caller to a Des Moines radio program inquire about the Oskaloosa monster. That article, which originally appeared in the *Earlham Gazette* on December 5, 1884, seemed to be just the one we were looking for. It described the monster in detail and told how it came out of the river and stole a hog that weighed at least 300 pounds.



But a quick check of an Iowa map told us Earlham is located west of Des Moines and is nowhere near the Skunk River. The editors of the *Echo* were puzzled, too. "There was no explanation why it was published in the *Earlham Gazette*. Probably just a good story," they wrote.

It turned out that we were not the first detectives investigating this mystery. In 1968, the sea monster legend intrigued editors of the *Oskaloosa Daily*

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Herald. Managing Editor Dave McMillen read the article in the Echo and decided to conduct his own research to determine if the legend were based on facts. The original article mentioned that the monster was skinned and would be sent to the Academy of Natural Science in Philadelphia. McMillen learned that the Academy of Natural Science did in fact exist. Unfortunately, no one there had a record of the Oskaloosa specimen. Next he checked issues of the 1884 *Herald.* He found two references to the monster, but couldn't find the original article that supposedly had been printed there. He decided to reprint the story anyway and reached this conclusion: "Whether there really was a monster, we don't know. We'll let you decide for yourself. But, we think you will agree, it is a good story."

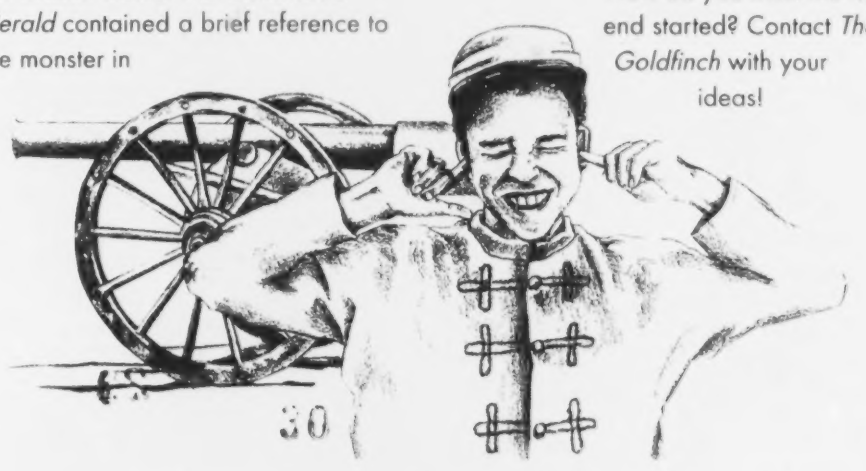
FACT OR Fiction?

The Oskaloosa sea monster may have begun as a hoax, much like the Cardiff Giant. Newspaper accounts credit Al Swalm with the idea of loading a cannon with railroad spikes to slay the beast. Swalm, known as a practical joker, was editor and part owner of the *Oskaloosa Weekly Herald* in 1884. Other men mentioned in news accounts also lived in Oskaloosa at the time. Were their names mentioned to make the story seem true? Or, were they all practical jokers?

Perhaps the entire story was motivated by politics. In 1884, Grover Cleveland, a Democrat, defeated James Blaine, a Republican, for president of the United States. The *Oskaloosa Herald* contained a brief reference to the monster in December 1884, saying that Cleveland, "like other prominent Democrats was bound to have the whole hog or none, with free trade and transportation." This indicated that the writer thought Cleveland was unwilling to compromise on important issues of the day. The article went on to say, "It might be well to keep that 12-pounder in readiness for any other of those southern fellows who may come this way." The '12-pounder' refers to the cannon used to slay the monster.

The reference to southern fellows might have meant southern sympathizers who migrated into Iowa from the South following the Civil War. Dave McMillen wrote in a March 1968 *Herald* article that these men "harbored ambitions of recapturing the south and restoring it to its proper place." They kept guns in a cave and periodically went up and down the Skunk River preying on livestock. Because of this, the gang became known as the "monster."

How do you think the legend started? Contact *The Goldfinch* with your ideas!



MYTHS & LEGENDS

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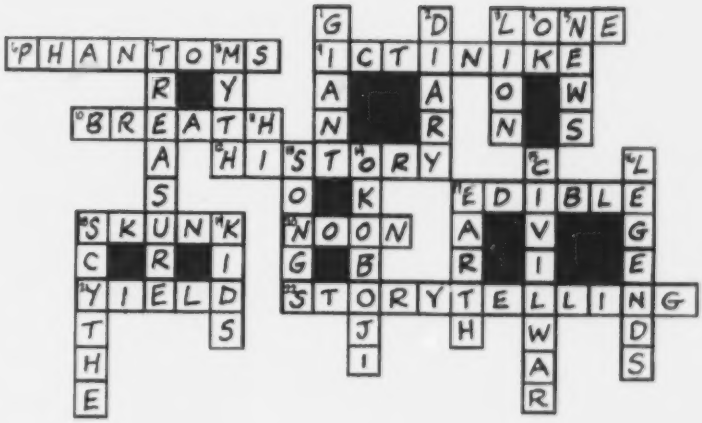
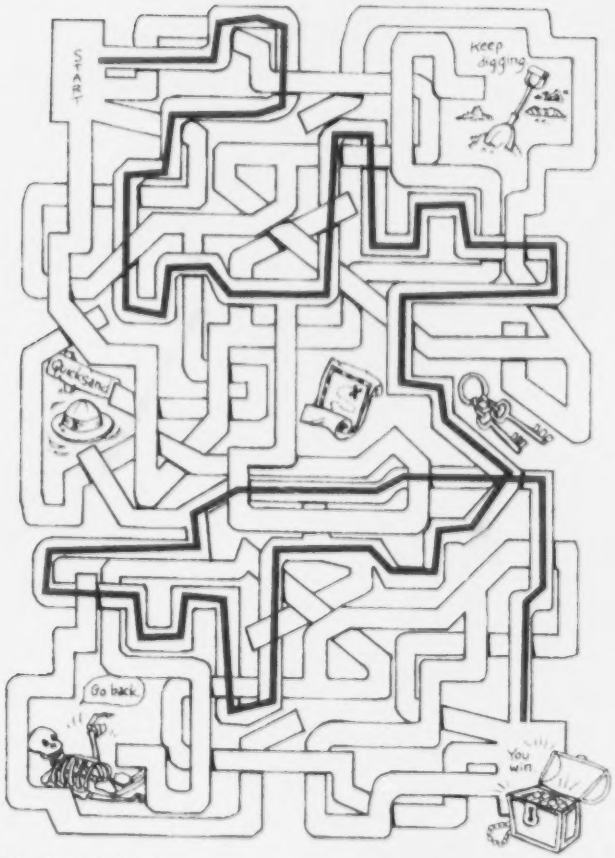




How Do You Start a Modern Myth?
Ask the Professors at U of O!

by Katherine House

When it comes to football, Iowans are divided about which college team to support. But many people in Iowa root for the University of Okoboji Phantoms, a team that remains undefeated throughout its long history. How could that be, you ask? You've never heard of the Phantoms?

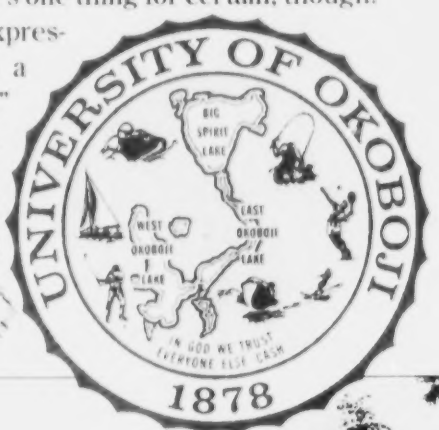
Maybe that's because the Phantoms, as their name suggests, don't really exist. In fact, neither does the University of Okoboji, or does it?

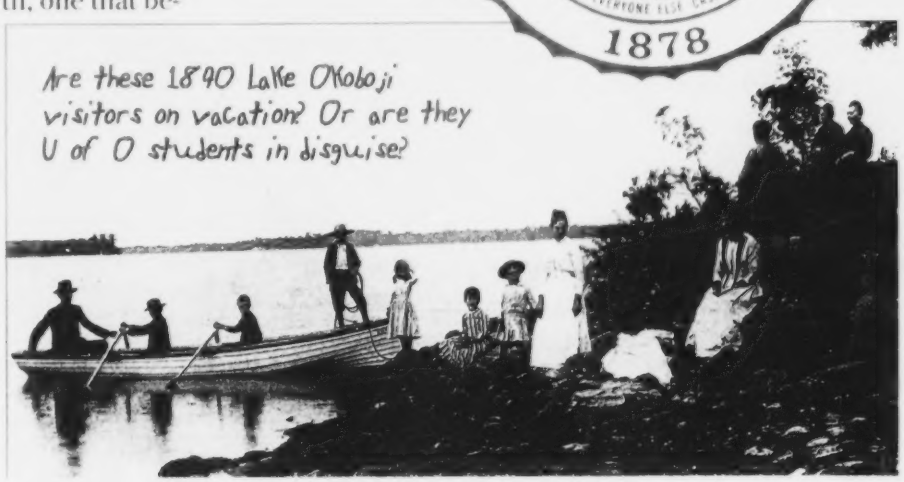
Visitors to Iowa's Great Lakes region throw trash in wastebaskets that say, "Help Keep your Campus Clean." Cars throughout Iowa Display University of Okoboji stickers. School supporters, including former President George Bush, wear T-shirts with the university logo. High school students visit the campus annually looking for the administration building. There's even a telephone number for the institution listed in the phone book.

Although there are many real aspects of this university, there are no classes or professors. That's because the college is a modern myth, one that began in 1973. At the time, Herman Richter, a Milford business owner, got together with friends and relatives for a weekly softball game. They always joked about "Camp Okoboji" because of the variety of recreational activities available in the Great Lakes region.

Richter had T-shirts printed with an official-looking U of O logo that proclaimed, "In God We Trust. Everyone Else Cash." The T-shirts sold quickly, and residents and area visitors embraced the mythical university. From the joke grew the U of O Foundation, a real fund-raising group that has donated money for community causes. The Great Lakes region also hosts several university sporting events, including Winter Games each January.

"It gets confusing," says Richter, who holds the title Director of Student Affairs. "It's part myth. It's part reality." There's one thing for certain, though. "It began as an expression of pride in a beautiful area," Richter explains. "Wherever you live, be proud of your area and hometowns."





Are these 1890 Lake Okoboji visitors on vacation? Or are they U of O students in disguise?

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